

Jesus Warned of the Traditions of Men

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to explain to others that their unbelief will be forgiven and they will receive eternal life when they come to Jesus in repentance and faith. In this topic, we see that Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees that they were hypocrites because they obeyed the traditions of men but did not obey the commandments of God.

The scribes and Pharisees were always looking for an opportunity to accuse either Jesus or the disciples of breaking their traditions. Matthew 15:1-2 says, “Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, ‘Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’” Here, we see that a group of scribes and Pharisees had traveled from Jerusalem for the purpose of accusing Jesus and His disciples of breaking their traditions. These were traditions that the scribes and Pharisees had formed after some of the Jews had returned from Babylon. They were not even written down at the time of Jesus and were not written down until nearly two hundred years after the time of Jesus. However, the Pharisees and scribes treated these as if they were as important as the Old Testament.

The Pharisees and scribes accused Jesus of failing to follow the tradition of the elders in the way that they washed their hands. Mark 7:3-4 says, “For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders. *When they come* from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other things which they have received and hold, *like* the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches.” It was not a case that the disciples had not washed their hands. The Pharisees taught that the people were to wash their hands a special way. The Pharisees would have someone pour water over their hands with their fingers pointing up until the water began to drip from their wrists. Then, they would turn their hands over and have the person pour water over their hands with the fingers pointing down. Finally, they would make one hand a fist to wipe the water from the one hand and then repeat the process with the other hand. These traditions had become more important than obeying the Old Testament to the Pharisees and scribes.

Jesus answered the question of the scribes and Pharisees with a question. Matthew 15:3-6 says, “He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, “He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.” But you say, “Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me *is a gift to God*’— then he need not honor his father or mother.” Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.’” Suddenly, the Pharisees were confronted with their sin.

Jesus quoted the fourth of the Ten Commandments which is given in Exodus 20:12 where we read, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD

your God is giving you.” Here, we see that this commandment explains how we are to treat our parents with the promise that such actions will bring blessing. Jesus went on to show that the Pharisees did not honor their parents. In contrast to that promise of blessing, Jesus quoted Leviticus 20:9 to show the judgment of those who chose to dishonor their parents, ““For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood *shall be* upon him.”” This verse made it clear that God warned of judgment for anyone that would curse their parents by their words or their actions.

Then, Jesus went on to point out that the traditions of the elders were being used by the scribes and Pharisees to avoid honoring their parents and were actually a form of evil that gave a curse. The verses in Mark 7:11-13 tell what Jesus said when those verses say, ““But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me *is* Corban’—” (that is, a gift *to God*), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.” Scribes or Pharisees who became angry with their parents would just say “Corban”. Then, if their parents came later needing financial or some other form of help, the scribe or Pharisee would quote this tradition. This was their way of telling their parents that they had dedicated everything to God for His service so it would be a sin for them to use anything that they had to help their parents. In this way, they did not honor their parents by helping them in times of need.

Jesus then went on to explain what the scribes and Pharisees had done by their tradition. Jesus said that they made the commandment of God of no effect. The word translated “no effect” means *to make something void or to make a command so that it has no authority*. Jesus said that such actions showed that the scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites. The word “hypocrite” was the word used to describe an actor who wore different masks in a play and pretended to be different people. The scribes and Pharisees were pretending to give what they had to God to cover the fact that they were actually cursing their parents by their actions and words.

Here, we see the danger when people develop traditions that reject the responsibility that God has given. Colossians 2:8-10 warns, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.” The word translated “cheat” means *to carry away spoil* and spoke about a person that committed robbery. Christians can be robbed by human philosophies that are in disagreement with the Word of God. Here, we see that such philosophies are really a way that Satan uses to lead people away from the truth. In addition, the traditions of man can blind people to the truth so that they do not come to the truth. 2 Timothy 3:5-7 warns that there will be people, “Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Here, we see that Satan tries to use false teachers to keep people from ever coming to the truth.

Jesus then went on to quote the prophet Isaiah to show what Isaiah had prophesied about these actions in Matthew 15:7-9 where we read, “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” Jesus quoted these words from Isaiah 29:13. Jesus here explained to the scribes and Pharisees that Isaiah had been talking about them and others like them when he wrote these words. The scribes and Pharisees all claimed to follow God. However, they made their own traditions more important than the Word of God. In Matthew 23:15, Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.” Here, we see how hard the scribes and Pharisees worked to get the people to follow their traditions and become one with the Pharisees. We see that they traveled from place to place to convince even one person to become a Pharisee.

In this quote from Isaiah, Jesus described the heart attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees as well as many of the other people. The scribes and Pharisees claimed to serve God. Jesus had given a description of some of the things that they did in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 6:1 says, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” Matthew 6:5 adds, “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” Matthew 6:16 says, “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.” In these verses, we see that these things were all done to be seen by man because these hypocrites wanted to appear to serve God.

However, Isaiah and Jesus said that their hearts were far from God. Their false worship was empty and worthless. Earlier in this topic, we looked at Mark 7:3-4 which talked of the traditions of the Pharisees and Jews. Verse 5 goes on to say, “Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’” Most of the Jews had replaced the Word of God with their traditions. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:14, “And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” Paul advanced in Judaism by his emphasis on those traditions but his heart was far from God as he persecuted the early Christians.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to focus on their personal relationship with God in their hearts and not on the outward traditions that many people have added to the Word of God, just as the Pharisees had done. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children what it means to be obedient to the Word of God.